



Lyndsie Erdy, PhD, NCSP, BCBA-D

Devereux Center for Effective Schools, King of Prussia, PA

November 2019

Describe the site where you work and how you decided on this type of placement.

I am currently a Training and Consulting Specialist at the Devereux Center for Effective Schools (CES), located just outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Our mission at the CES is to build “the capacity of schools and other child-serving institutions to better serve children and adolescents with, and at risk for developing, emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD).” The CES is a bit of a unique environment for a school psychologist. All of the work we do is indirect, and much of the work we do is preventive in nature and implemented at the systems level. In other words, we support staff in improving their systems, practices, and use of data as they go about supporting their students. While we provide training and consultation in typical school settings (primarily urban), we also provide support to alternative education programs, after school programs, residential treatment facilities, and even parents.

At the CES, we work collaboratively on team-based projects. Depending on the size of the project, there are typically two to four CES staff assigned. Currently, most of my work is in alternative education settings that serve students with

EBD. In these settings, I collaboratively support teams by developing and implementing classroom coaching models to improve evidence-based Tier 1 practices within the classroom setting, restructuring and enhancing Tier 2 systems for behavior support, improving the efficiency of meeting procedures and data-based decision making, and developing a cohesive and comprehensive transition to adulthood program for high school students. In addition to my work in alternative education, I also support an early childhood program with implementation and sustainability of program-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (PWPBIS; i.e., the Pyramid Model), and coach for evidence-based behavior management strategies.

I knew that I wanted to have a career in systems-level work in education even before I had the words for it. As an undergraduate student majoring in education, I had had many experiences, primarily in urban school settings, where I saw the need for more systematic approaches for managing challenging student behavior. Teachers were burnt out. Students weren't achieving like I believed they could. I knew there had to be something that could be done differently and not just student by student. I also developed a desire to better understand behavior, generally. I wanted to know why students behaved in certain ways and what I could do about it. This led me to pursue the study of school psychology and applied behavior analysis (ABA) at the University of Cincinnati. It was there that I learned there was actually such a thing as systems-level intervention (i.e. MTSS). I was hooked! I gained so much understanding through my course work and applied experiences of what teachers could do to better support students at both the individual and classroom levels, not only to reduce problem behavior, but also to increase prosocial behavior—so many things I would have loved to know during my own time in the classroom. I am thankful that my job today allows me to share this knowledge with teachers all across southeastern Pennsylvania.

What are your areas of expertise at this point in your career?

I tend to struggle with calling myself an expert (in the way I refer to my colleagues) because I realize that (a) I am still early in my career, and (b) there will *always* be more to learn. Having said that, at this point in my career, I would consider myself an expert in applied behavior analysis, multitiered systems of

support (particularly for behavior), classroom management and classroom coaching, individual and systems-level consultation, and working with students with EBD.

Describe your engagement in the local community and how this affects your work?

Working indirectly in the field, one of the things I miss most about being in a more typical school setting is interacting and building relationships with students on a regular basis. Shortly after I moved to Philadelphia in 2017, I became aware of an incredible organization called Students Run Philly Style (SRPS). SRPS is a running and mentoring program serving approximately 1,500 middle and high school students in the city of Philadelphia. A friend of mine decided to start an SRPS group at a charter school in North Philadelphia, where she served as an ESL coordinator, and asked if I was interested in volunteering as a coach. Of course, I said yes! For the past year and a half, I have had the honor of training for local races alongside a small but dedicated group of high school students. (I tell them every weekend how proud I am of them showing up to the school early on Saturday mornings, especially when most of their friends are sleeping in.) I love this program for a number of reasons, but, more than anything, I have enjoyed getting to know the students on our team and cheer them on as they accomplish things they never dreamed they could.

In terms of its impact on my work, SRPS has given me the opportunity to better understand the students and communities I have the privilege of serving here in Philadelphia, especially because many of these students come from backgrounds and cultures different from my own. Spending time with our runners also reminds me of why I came into this field in the first place—to make a positive impact on the lives of students (as well as their teachers and families). Between the indirect nature of my work and my daily to do list, I can lose sight of that if I am not careful. These student runners are a weekly reminder of why I do what I do.

Describe a challenge that you have faced in your early career and how you handled it. What advice do you have for other early career school psychologists with similar challenges?

One of the challenges I have faced in my early career has been avoiding the temptation of comparing myself to others in the field. Throughout my short career, I have been blessed to work alongside many talented individuals with varying strengths and areas of expertise. While I have grown tremendously as a result of working with these colleagues, at times I struggle to resist weighing my own skills and accomplishments against theirs. I can also get caught up in thinking, “because ‘so and so’ is doing X, I should be doing X, too.”

Two things that have helped me to navigate this challenge include perspective taking and reflecting on my personal goals and values. First, I have to remember that we have all walked different roads to get to where we are today, both in terms of training and experience. Some people have had more specific training on certain topics or practices. Some have been working in the field longer, gathering knowledge and experience over time. I really can’t compare myself to someone who’s not me, who hasn’t walked the same road that I’ve walked. If I *have* to compare, I can really only compare my current self to my past self, reflecting on my own personal growth over time. (And I should note that, thanks to all my colleagues’ varying knowledge and skills, much of my growth is a result of being taught and shaped by them!)

The second thing I have to remember is to take time to reflect on my personal goals and values. We all have different goals and values related to our careers and personal lives, and how we choose to pursue or balance those things often looks different person to person. When I am caught up in thinking that I *need* to or *should* be doing something just because someone else is doing it, it helps me to think about the things that I really want to be about in life and evaluate whether or not the thing that I *feel* like I should be doing is in line with that. It also helps to remember that sometimes, even when *that thing* does align with my goals or values, I may have to say “no” to *that thing* in order to say “yes” to something else, especially depending on the season of life I’m in. It has been hard, but I am learning to say “no” more often.

What specific aspects of NASP membership and involvement have affected or benefited you in your career thus far? Why is membership in NASP important to you?

One of my favorite things about my NASP membership has been the access to the vast array of resources, including not only the handouts and other physical resources that can be shared with parents, teachers, and principals, but also the professional development and networking opportunities available through the annual conventions and interest groups. I have been attending the annual convention since 2014, and it continues to be an event I look forward to year after year. It is always fun to catch up with colleagues from around the country and to catch up on the latest trends and research in the field.